

Conservation Reserve Program



photo: NRCS Oklahoma

June Austin of Geary, Oklahoma, and District Conservationist Duane Crider, El Reno Field Service Center, look over the native grass stand that was planted this year. "This is an excellent stand for the first year," said Crider. "We found all of the 'big four' grasses plus side oats grama, Illinois Bundle Flower and Partridge Pea."

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's single largest environmental improvement program and one of the most effective. CRP encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to long-term vegetative cover such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filterstrips or riparian buffers.

For all CRP contracts offered, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical assistance determining the land eligibility, suitability of the practice, and predominant soil types for the eligible acreage offered. The Natural Resources Conservation Service also develops a conservation plan of operation with the producer, approved by the local natural resources district.

The USDA's Farm Service Agency and the Commodity Credit Corporation administer CRP and issue the rental payment checks. The Secretary of Agriculture announces any future CRP enrollments.

For Conservation Reserve Program Signup 20, in the spring of 2000, Oklahoma landowners enrolled 40,726 acres through 430 contracts. It is estimated from this signup that total rental payments will be over \$1.4 million with an average rental payment of \$35.34 per acre.

Oklahoma currently has enrolled slightly more than one million acres of cropland in CRP. In Oklahoma, almost \$40 million is paid annually to CRP contract holders. Nationally, 33.4 million acres are enrolled.

In Oklahoma, the Conservation Reserve Program safeguards over one million cropland acres by reducing soil erosion and sedimentation in streams and lakes, protecting the state's ability to produce food and fiber, improving water quality, establishing wildlife habitat, and enhancing forest and wetland resources. Oklahomans receive annual rental payments for the term of the multi-year contract, 10 to 15 years. To establish the vegetative cover practices, a 50 percent cost-share is available.

CRP was first introduced in the 1985 Farm Bill and has been included in the 1990 and 1996 Farm Bills. Since 1997, only the most environmentally sensitive land, yielding the greatest environmental benefits, is accepted into CRP.

Continuous CRP

Since 1996, landowners have been able to sign up for certain high-priority conservation practices for the Continuous CRP any time during the year. These practices include filter strips, riparian buffers, shelter belts, field windbreaks, living snowfences, grassed waterways, shallow water areas for wildlife, salt-tolerant vegetation, cross wind traps strips, and wellhead protection areas.

